Talking up drama in Singapore: how drama improved oral English examination results.

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for the
Artistic and Creative Education Colloquium
University of Melbourne
26 March, 2007
Two Projects

- **DOL: Drama and Oral Language 2004**
  - 4 schools; Normal Technical Students (S4); 10 hours of drama externally planned and facilitated by trained teachers.

- **Speaking Out: 2005 & 2006**
  - 1 (neighbourhood) school; 10 English teachers & 17 classes (S1/S2); PD and ongoing support in terms of co-planning and co-teaching.
DOL: Early thoughts and plans

- Focus on learning in drama
- Interweaving of activities necessitating communication throughout the drama structures
- Connect with syllabus – esp. testing
- Choice of Sec 4 Normal Tech students
- Preparation of materials
- Selection and training of facilitators.
## Communication requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missing Girl</th>
<th>Lost civilization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Info:</strong> relating events to lived experiences</td>
<td><strong>Info:</strong> mantle of expert roles as scientists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soc. Int.:</strong> interviewing roles in hot-seats, planning sequence of events</td>
<td><strong>Soc. Int.:</strong> roleplay scientists and ‘others’; persuade release of Susan Lim.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LR &amp; exp:</strong> discussion and interpretation of pre-text</td>
<td><strong>LR &amp; exp:</strong> create the roles and location of ‘other group’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Spy Drama

- **Info:** immigration at airport.
- **Soc. Int:** plan ‘back story’ to roles; investigate events
- **LR & exp:** participate in role in constructed sequence of events

### Bukit Merah

- **Info:** investigate use and misuse of power
- **Soc. Int:** cooperate in meeting in role to plan approach to Sultan
- **LR & exp:** respond to story & create village and roles
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<th>Pre-test total</th>
<th>Clarity</th>
<th>Vocab</th>
<th>Relev</th>
<th>Inter</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
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Teacher comments

- Thinking
- Cooperation
- Confidence
- Enjoyment
- Contextualised
- Motivation
- Overall

Student comments

- Enjoyable
- You have to think and learn in a different way.
- More confident
- Know more words
- Imagination
Implications and further explorations

- Transferability
- Teacher/facilitator preparation
- Group co-operation
- Interaction across racial groups
- Development of learning over time
- Interweaving of language learning
- Potential for language and literature classrooms
- Assessment of oral communication
Drama and ESOL

Learning in drama produced:

- greater use of language for a wider variety of purposes;
- more use of rarely used vocabulary;
- more use of abstract thinking and expressive language;
- understanding of language as a powerful tool enabling its user to ‘act upon’ instead of being ‘acted upon’.
Speak Out:

• Invited by the Principal to work as a consultancy with the school
• Wanted to investigate the teacher ‘capacity’ and needs for regular EL teachers to employ drama as pedagogy
• Provided PD January; assisted with planning; co-teaching; modelling – throughout the year.
The Speaking Out Project 2005

- Teacher preparation
- Teacher-researcher partnerships
  - Research briefings
  - Workshops
  - Drama camp
  - Readings
  - Consultation, co-planning and co-teaching
  - Video reflection
Teacher resistance

- Non-voluntary compliance with research
- Lack of understanding of drama
- Role of the administration
- Communication strategies employed by the research team
- Beliefs, consultation, commitment and resistance
Shift in teaching style

A usual English lesson will be more teacher focused, and less on the student interaction. So I think [in a] drama lesson there’s more student interaction, more student communication. Yeah and there’s a lot of movement, so it’s not only just sit and do work but rather they’re always moving around [to] explore issues and everything. [This is] something that might not be done well if it’s just a normal English lesson you know where they sit down and have a discussion. Devi (interview 281005)
Moving from

- Short-term
- Exercise-based
- Teacher-controlled
- Closed activities

  e.g.
  script, scripted role-play, readers’ theatre, language games

Moving to

- Extended
- Context-based
- Student input
- Complex & open

  e.g.
  unscripted role-play/improvisation, playbuilding, process drama

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Understanding drama pedagogy

For someone who is familiar with the conventions it becomes easier. For someone who is not, then you become less ... you are a little hesitant about trying it out immediately because you know you are afraid that the lesson will be wasted or you are making a mess out of it. I mean I am the sort of person who has to ... maybe someone else would be more versatile, be able to do it. I am a little bit inflexible I guess. (Pei Shan 290805)
Seeing the benefit

- Overall, I noticed a greater unity among the groups and they conversed in English to a greater extent this time round. They usually do not speak other languages in class, but they do not attempt to converse much in English. (Chan journal – 1005)
I can see a significant increase in the number of students who speak English during that one or two lessons rather than only a handful speaking out during one lesson. So I think, in a way, it has created an awareness or created a need to speak English to one another. (Chan 050505)
Non-voluntary compliance

We were not given [an option to participate] although it says in the contract that we can choose to do it. We were told by the people here that we have to do it. ... No way out of, getting out of this thing that we had to do. So we were quite irritated you know. ... that kind of upset most of us anyway in the beginning and we were quite hostile. Anna (290805)
Problems that arose:

- Only group within the school undertaking research
- Time
- Teacher reflection
- Teacher agency
- Role of HOD
A positive note.

- We were not left on our own and a lot of times you guys were actually willing to come down at our convenience for you to have co-planning, co-teaching with us. So that was really very nice of you guys to do that ... I mean you were very flexible and all that ... sometimes we stood you up ... so you’ve been very, very understanding and accommodating. Suhailah (281005)
Some considerations for future research.

- Participation – voluntary and sincere
- Mutually beneficial research
- Built-in accountability
- What is promised should be delivered
- The school liaison/contact person is someone with substantial authority within the school
- The school liaison/contact person is a participant in the research.
The Singapore drama dialogue

- SDEA
- Non-curricular drama in Singapore
  - The National Arts Council’s AEP programs
    - Exposure
    - Excursion
    - Experience
  - SYF drama competition
  - ‘development through drama’ programs
Into the curriculum

- DOL project 2004
- Teacher guidelines for Sec 1 drama
- Officer with Drama background seconded to CPDD
- IGCSE/UCLES
- Teacher preparation at NIE
  - Undergraduate; Diplomas; Master of Education.
At NIE

- Drama as AS1 or AS2 as part of the BA.
- Advanced Diploma and Advanced Post-Graduate Diploma in Drama and Drama Education
- Masters of Education (Drama) by coursework
- Short-term in-service courses