Speaking Out

an investigation into the impact of process drama on oral language development.

madonna.stinson@nie.edu.sg
The research journey

- School-based
- English language teachers
- Initiated by the Principal
- Following DOL:
A particular aim of the ‘Speak Out’ project was to investigate the needs of teachers for support and professional development as they began to include drama strategies as part of their pedagogical repertoire for the teaching of English.

‘In time to come we will see ourselves as an academic institution which is open to conducting research.’ Principal
Moving from | Moving to
---|---
- Short-term
- Exercise-based
- Teacher-controlled
- Closed activities
  e.g. script, scripted role-play, readers’ theatre, language games

- Extended
- Context-based
- Student input
- Complex & open
  e.g. unscripted role-play/improvisation, playbuilding, process drama
School-based intervention 1 year

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

- Shift in teaching style
- Lack of understanding of drama pedagogy
- Seeing the benefit
- Role of the administration
- Non-voluntary compliance with research
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)
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)
Role of the administration

I expected teachers to feel uncomfortable; to feel that they are being watched. And I expected them to object to having to do this and I think it did happen in the earlier stage where the teachers felt that I did not consult them enough before accepting such a big project. And I had a long conversation with one such teacher and she told me how they felt: not that they minded doing this, but they minded [that I] did not consult them first and they were not given the opportunity to choose to be involved. (Chen Lili interview: 150405)
Issues that arose:

- Only group within the school undertaking research
- Time
- Teacher reflection
- Teacher agency
- Role of HOD/Administration
Some considerations for school-based intervention 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