

Theatre as a Means for Teaching a Second Language

GATESOL Journal
2022, Vol. 32(2), pp. 14–26
doi:10.52242/gatesol.163
ISSN: 2331-6845

Claire L. Holman

University of Georgia

Abstract

This paper discusses theatre as a way to enhance and/or revitalize the language classroom both in second and foreign language contexts. Theatre and drama have been identified as creative pedagogical approaches to engage students to interact in situations and realistic scenarios in which their second language would be used in an accessible, safe way that adequately prepares them for language use in the real world. Using theatre and drama as instructional support does not disregard current language teaching practices, but provides educators options to enhance their teaching and learning spaces. I hope the discussion presented here will inspire educators to integrate theatre into their classroom contexts because when language is accessible, approachable, and relevant in a fun and meaningful way, language learning and acquisition are achievable.

Keywords

theatre, drama, product-based, processed-based, creation, devised work

Introduction

I regard the theater as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being. –Oscar Wilde

Performance theorist Schechner (2020) describes performance as *being* which is existence itself, *doing* which is the activity of all that exists, and *showing doing* which is performing: pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing. More than just an actor reciting a soliloquy on stage, performance is the way a student feigns attention in class, the way one carefully selects an outfit for a job interview, the way we binge the newest Netflix hit. Performance, according to Schechner, is central to our very existence. All that we do and all that we are is performance.

Discourse analyst Gee (2011) similarly connects language to performance. He asserts that meaning in discourse is created in/by the ways we communicate who we are and what we are doing in the here and now. In order to co-construct meaning, interlocutors must perform effectively in the role(s) they wish to portray (i.e., identity). Each component of language (i.e., phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics) develops the grand performance of one's identity with the external processes of speaking and writing, which fronts the performance, while reading and listening inform the choices one makes toward that performance. Gestures and other forms of non-verbal communication contribute to this performance. Thus, an important inquiry arises: how can language be taught in accordance with this idea?

Common in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms but also salient in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts is a way of teaching language that “decontextualizes

language,” directing the focus entirely to “grammar, syntax, vocabulary, pronunciation and functional aspects” (DiNapoli, 2009, p. 98; see also Lei & Huang 2012; Kuyumcu, 2013; Pandian et al., 2014). These elements are unequivocally important and necessary, but they depict language as a system of sounds and words and tends to overlook the rich and complex fixture of culture and communication. To truly communicate and participate in the target language (TL), students must be taught in a way that recontextualizes language into its culture and builds their communicative skills. As Gee (2011) illustrates, “it is not grammar alone (or primarily) that carries out the work of achieving status and solidarity, but the ways in which words are spoken, or, we might say, how one ‘designs’ one’s utterances” (p. 113). Viewing language as a performance, as something grander than the words, and as something richly dependent on context allows one to understand these complexities and visualize a new way of teaching.

Since the end goal of learning a language, for many, is to be able to communicate effectively or, as defined by Schechner (2020), to perform effectively, language should be rehearsed and practiced before students encounter it outside the classroom. To create an environment where language can be rehearsed, language curricula should be infused with drama and theatrics in order to transform language from simply conjugation drills and vocabulary quizzes into a breathing piece of art, culture, and life. Wagner (1979) asserts that dramatic instruction is “particularly well suited” to not only hone skills, but also to learn the rhetorical effect of vocabulary and grammatical structures in usage with others (pp. 268–269). Wagner’s (1979) work develops that dramatic instruction furthers the skills taught from those drills and quizzes and turns them into usable units of language. Ultimately, the incorporation of theatre and drama into the language classroom creates an effective *rehearsal* environment that mimics real world scenarios for language use, developing both interpersonal/intrapersonal skills and language competency, breaking typical classroom constraints.

In this paper, I will discuss the benefits of using theatre before addressing the instructional practices used by teachers for incorporating theatre and drama into the language classroom. Readers will then be able to understand how theatre increases motivation and self-confidence, decreases language-related anxiety, and could improve command over language skills. The general approaches discussed will break down theatre versus drama and establish the specific benefits and details of each as well as the contexts they are best suited for. I will then address the major concerns educators have about changing their teaching approaches into these more artistic educational practices before I summarize my points. At the end of the paper, I hope to create new perspectives on theatre’s place in the language classroom and motivate readers to incorporate theatre and drama into their pedagogical repertoire.

Benefits of Theatre

This section will discuss how theatre creates a unique environment that allows for realistic practice of and a strong connection to the target language. Then, it will explore the positive impact this context could have on the learner’s interpersonal/intrapersonal skills by decreasing anxiety and improving motivation and self-confidence. Finally, it will discuss the ways theatre can support language development.

A Realistic Environment

As discussed above, language can be academic and can be studied, but its true utility comes from its basis as a contextualized speech act, an utterance spoken for a purpose, within a discourse, within a culture. One commonly used instructional style that emphasizes the academic nature of

language is *focus on forms*, an explicit method that is targeted toward supporting learners to “master the structural features listed on the syllabus” (Ellis, 2015, p. 262). DiNapoli (2009) asserted that this method and others like it that focus almost entirely on the more academic qualities of language “lack affective commitment” (p. 101), meaning these pedagogical approaches do not inspire connection to the language. Through drama, however, students are provided with “more opportunities for encountering contextualized exposure to the language, in which they could experience the signaling value of natural and more spontaneous communication” (DiNapoli, 2009, p. 106) which raises affect, or students’ positive attitudes toward the language, via turning students’ attention to the real-world contexts beyond the classroom. By eliminating *focus on forms* and putting language into its natural context, language can be understood as it exists naturally.

Theatre and drama could create a naturally occurring context by establishing a scenario within the classroom space that is as close to reality as possible, which can be particularly useful in foreign language education settings when the culture is not easily accessible to the learners. It is just as useful in second language or immersion settings where learners may need the benefit of a rehearsal space to explore and try new forms and features before needing to use these structures in real world scenarios where mistakes can lead to confusing, embarrassing, or even potentially dangerous misunderstandings (Pang, 2019). *Acting*, as Meisner et al. (1987) defined, is “behaving truthfully under imaginary circumstances” (p. 27) meaning that despite pretend circumstances, acting encourages students to use their target language (TL) with their true selves. In theatre productions and drama exercises, the circumstances may be whatever the director wishes, such as a sticky situation in a foreign country or an important interaction with proficient speakers of the language. Through this reliance on imagination, students could develop a sensitivity to the intricacies of TL interaction and become familiar “with the cultural appropriateness of words and expressions to specific settings and social situations” (Stern, 1980, p. 79). The students develop these essential skills out of a need to act truthfully in the scene, to communicate as they would in their first language with attention to the new context they are speaking in. By creating these opportunities, the learners are able to take their passive knowledge from the textbook and classroom assignments and shift what they know into useful communicative information, made accessible by the use of theatre.

Personal Skills

Overcoming fears. A benefit of these imaginary circumstances is the removal of the performance-related anxiety that stems from interaction with proficient speakers. The classroom, even when turned into a Parisian café or the set of a Korean drama, is still a classroom, designed to be a safe space with only the intention of facilitating learning and exploration. Stern (1980) asserts that in addition to the inherent safety of the classroom, students find safety in numbers while working as a performing ensemble and can find security behind a role. It is easy to feel secure when the words and personalities expressed are not one’s own. There is less risk being laughed at after making a mistake, especially if everyone in the class is in the same situation. Even the anxious, quiet student can find security in the understanding that these projects and exercises are rehearsals, prefacing success within the TL. The risks are low and the benefits are high. Of course, some students will likely still feel uncomfortable with performing even in this situation. Stern (1980), who examined dramatic role-play specifically, asserted that:

If they fail to communicate outside of class, the results can be embarrassing or even harmful. But in role-play, having the courage to demonstrate the ability to use the second language is in itself a success, and they should therefore not be embarrassed by a poor performance. It follows that they should be less inhibited using the language in role-play than in real life, and therefore function better than they thought they could. This in turn should raise their self-esteem. (p. 85)

Stern's observation demonstrates the weighted risks inside and outside of classroom spaces and examines the positive effect that this vulnerability can have on the learner, proving that the implementation of theatre practices creates a safe space to truly be culturally and linguistically vulnerable. Additionally, one study at Keimyung University that examined how adult English learners in South Korea perceived the way that drama use in their classroom impacted their second language (L2) development found that, across three case studies, students gained self-confidence from compliments and good advice from teachers and the realization that hard, scary things like communicating in the TL are possible (Park, 2015). The result resolved preliminary fears and the students believed they ended better than they began, establishing that stage fright is combatable and worth the work to overcome.

Motivation. Another difficulty that can sometimes trouble the second language classroom is overcoming low motivation. In a traditional class based around tests and quizzes, the only motivation for students may be to get a good grade, which could push their focus to memorize information for passing tests. When the unit is over and the exams are done, the students no longer have use for what they just studied and lose what knowledge they have just gained. However, in a classroom that utilizes a communicative approach based in theatre and drama, student motivation could change and increase greatly because when we speak, “we risk our psychological well-being” which can either be an inhibitor or a motivator to students (Smith, 1984, p. 6). As discussed above, theatre and the safe space it creates might be able to decrease fears surrounding risk taking and at the same time increase student motivation with the knowledge that there is safety behind a character and safety in numbers.

Furthermore, one of the most important ideals of theatre is *creation*, which supports student motivation. Ntelioglou (2011) states that the “process of creation, rehearsal, and performance of these dramatic performances” (p. 603) motivates the students greatly. Thus, giving students a platform to create and tell the stories they wish to tell transforms the classroom space into a studio for creativity to thrive. Maley and Duff (1978) define this creativity in conjunction with the opportunity for imagination and discovery through working together as “imaginative personal involvement” (p. 13). The students' performances are created uniquely by them and the people they perform with. Even if another student performed the same role or acted in a similar scenario, the performance would not be the same. This idea is the beauty of the ephemerality of theatre and a great motivator for each student. Creating something that is truly yours and performing it in such a vulnerable way can raise motivation in a way that the average classroom cannot (Lee et al., 2020).

Introducing fun. Moreover, performing is fun. Acting can be silly and exciting. Placing students into a scene with the intent to perform gives students reason to elicit some emotion or reaction from the audience. Acting could also empower learners to explore *language play*, which is the “manipulation of the surface properties of language . . . [that] encompasses with the flavors

of past uses of words or phrases, and play with the interpretative frameworks that a particular context allows” (Hann, 2017, p. 223). As Hann (2017) established, creativity and humor can turn mistakes/errors into positive experiences the students can “literally laugh off” (p. 240). Mistakes become both something to learn from and something to laugh about. By allowing the students to have fun and develop their personalities/unique senses of humor in the TL, students enjoy their time and thus feel unified with the other learners, proving that language play is “central to the process of making a community of practice with its own culture” (Hann, 2017, p. 240). This creation of an in-class culture bolsters the previously mentioned ‘safety in numbers’ principle found when examining why the classroom doubles as a rehearsal hall/safe space.

Academic Skills and Theatre Knowledge

Aside from the affective importance of theatre and drama, these practices are also beneficial for the learners’ command over the target language and theatre understanding. Davies (1990) asserts that “drama activities facilitate the type of language behavior that should lead to fluency” and fortify “the bond between thought and expression in language, provides practice of suprasegmentals and para-language, and offers good listening practice” (p. 96). Dodson (2002) investigates how drama activities (see Tables 1 and 2 below) improved advanced ESL university students’ self-perception of their English skills and knowledge of theatre as a genre.

Table 1

Drama Activities and Practical Applications for Developing English Skills (Dodson, 2002)

Skill	Activities	Application
Reading	Reading classic American play scripts (often revised to the ESL readers’ level) and articles about theatre not only enveloped students into the genre, but also promoted their reading comprehension in English	Reading Louise Fletcher’s <i>Sorry Wrong Number</i> (1948) and an article about a recent performance of the play
Writing	Daily collaborative and individual writing of responses to course materials and their own scripts boosted writing fluency. The collaborative exercises gave opportunities for discussion and negotiation.	Writing an alternate ending to <i>Sorry Wrong Number</i> or a response to the show
Speaking	Vocal Warm-Ups: Tongue twisters and choral readings allowed a focus on the suprasegmental elements of pronunciation that provided for a deeper look at sounds that caused difficulty for the students. In these exercises, students were asked to vary in pitch, level of projection, stress/intonation, and finding a natural pattern of breathing in English speech. These activities forced students to make the speech their own instead of simply memorizing patterns of stress and pitch.	Using classic tongue twisters like “She sells sea shells” or “Unique New York” to speed of speech and command over individual sounds

Table 2*Activities and Practical Applications for Developing Theatre Genre (Dodson, 2002)*

Theatre	Activities	Application
Improvisation	Short games that allowed students to practice spontaneous speech and work on extending the length of speech.	Playing games like “Scrapbook,” a game where two students pose as if they are on vacation and a third student must tell the story behind the ‘photo’ of the two students, or “One Word Story”, a game where students go around in a circle each contributing one word with the intention of collaboratively telling a story
Theatre Production	Students modified a script for their performance; rehearsed with it; designed costumes, lights, and a set, and worked on publicity. This project gave the class a real-world application and demonstrated students' improved control over the English language in a public setting.	A production of <i>Sorry Wrong Number</i> complete with costumes and a set (even if just a few chairs and a hat or scarf to show the different characters) and rehearsed over several weeks and performed one night for friends and family

Each activity tackled a specific part of the students’ path to fluency and provided creative, exciting ways for students to work on what were often trouble areas. Such was the case with vocal warmups being an excellent space for the teacher to tackle the smaller problems with suprasegmentals that were a source of self-consciousness and created comprehension problems from more proficient speakers. These findings from Dodson’s (2002) study provide support for the academic value of theatre.

In summation, aside from the fun, creative way it can create scenarios as close to real life language use as possible and raise the students’ motivation to take the risk of speaking in their TL, theatre/drama also benefits the academic skills of the student.

Methods: Product-based versus Process-based Learning

The differences between theatre and drama must be broken down. Throughout this paper, the terms theatre and drama have been used interchangeably because of their similarities in benefits, but the two refer to different styles of drama-based education. *Theatre* is the process and subsequent product of staging a theatrical production that combines performance, technical aspects, and an audience while *drama* refers to “classroom exercises” that “combine dialogue and action” (Burke & O’Sullivan, 2002, p. xiv). Each carries similar utility to the student, but has varying levels of commitment. No style is inherently better than the other as they have similar positive effects on the student.

Theatre instruction may look like a unit where students audition and are assigned parts for a script. That script can be rehearsed in class or outside of class depending on the context and available resources. The final product would involve some level of technical elements like costumes or a simple backdrop, which can also be created by students if the time/resources are available, and an audience whether it be parents or other classmates.

Drama is more flexible and can be utilized in any classroom for multiple class periods or for a single part of a lesson. Drama activities could take the form of a script writing project where,

over several classes, students write and perform their own play, or it could be a five-minute vocal warmup aimed at improving pronunciation of a difficult sound.

The biggest difference between the two practices lies in the end goal of each. The result of theatre is a performance for an audience with complete design and technical elements, but the result of utilizing drama is to supplement a lesson plan or unit of the course with exercises and games based in drama. For example, theatre-based instruction would be a production of *Alice and Wonderland* performed for parents with costumes, lighting, and a publicity campaign. Drama could be conceptualized as a role play exercise during the class period to help Spanish learners practice in various contexts to appropriately use *tú* versus *usted* (informal or formal forms of the pronoun *you*). A role play example to practice *tú* versus *usted*, for instance, could be performing at a made-up family dinner in Mexico.

Using theatre or drama-based instruction can be equated to product and process-based learning. *Product-based* (i.e., theatre-based instruction), emphasizes a formal, final performance “wherein the concluding dramatic realization in front of an audience is viewed as one of the primary goals of the learning experience” (Moody, 2002, p. 136). *Process-based* (i.e., drama-based instruction), draws focus to “the dramatic medium itself, in which the negotiation, rehearsal, and preparation for a more informal, or improvisational, in-class dramatic representation becomes the focus for language learning” (Moody, 2002, p. 135). It is paramount to note that neither of these instructional strategies are necessarily more important than the other; each practice has its own positives and negatives and not all teachers will have the means to execute both. Moreover, the overlap between the two can obscure any definite pros or cons as they are not distinct and mutually exclusive styles that absolutely cannot exist together. In the end, incorporating theatre into the classroom at all is more important than the specific styles you may choose.

Product-based Learning

Product-based learning is often heralded for its practical uses. Even in non-theatre instructional contexts, this style of learning and its real-world connections gives a practical utility to the instruction and the final product becomes clear evidence of their inquiry and the agency given to the learners in completing their project (Anderson, 2021). In short, this manner of instruction creates an emphasis on authenticity to introduce the learners to the practical, real ways language is used (Carson, 2012).

Another important piece of the real-world connection is an emphasis on interdisciplinary learning (Fonio, 2012). Utilizing this cross-disciplinary instruction deepens the level of authenticity by granting opportunities for creative integration of other subjects. In the context of theatre as product-based learning, the connection to theatrical production makes up the interdisciplinary connection. Aside from increasing students’ abilities within the dramatic arts, students can be exposed to artistic skills with designing the show, business skills through publicity, and also using Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) skills with lights and sound. What they learn when putting on a full production can be carried on into other classrooms and into the real world.

Additionally, needing to have a complete product by a certain day that will be performed for an audience motivates students “to accomplish the various activities effectively and on time” (Fonio, 2012, p. 20). Furthermore, by assigning students clear roles on and off stage for the production, they have a greater grasp of the impact they have as individuals on completing a project and forming an *ensemble*—a group dedicated to producing a cohesive, single product. Also, when students feel their efforts are essential to the success of the performance, they are more likely to

participate, contributing to a richer dialogue and creative process (Fonio, 2012). Underscoring the efficacy of product-based learning, Carson's (2012) study identified that dramatic products shape learners into co-agents which bridges the gap between individual and social. Learners must work together to create a shared knowledge or understanding through this process. As Carson (2012) later points out, the authentic connection that arises among learners in the foreign or second language classroom usually happens in students' L1 or occurs artificially in the target language. With Fonio's ideas in mind, we can postulate that in order to authenticate classroom target language use, more meaning must be given to these activities. The meaning students create together through the collaborative nature of a theatrical production possesses an inherent, authentic meaning that supersedes any artificial meaning manufactured through typical language classroom activities. That is to say, the creation of a product by nature authenticates the conversations and discussions students have in the target language. When students are forced to risk their sense of self by performing and when they are forced to communicate in a real world, cross-disciplinary situation, they truly become co-agents, creating a shared meaning and a shared product.

To summarize, *product-based learning* is understood in this context to be the process of creating the final presentation of a theatrical performance. This style of instruction may be favored if the resources are available because of its real-world applications and cross-disciplinary nature that fosters authentic communication in the target language and authentic knowledge of other subject areas.

Process-based Learning

Process-based learning, on the other hand, is ideal for educators with fewer resources, less time, or less experience working with theatre because it can be incorporated into just about any lesson plan with varying degrees of commitment. Process-based learning can take the form of improvisational games, role plays, exercises using TPR (Total Physical Response), miming, or script writing activities; anything based in the dramatic arts. Aside from the benefits for classes desiring a lesser commitment, a classroom that utilizes *process-based learning* becomes as Moody (2002) stated, "an open learning environment" (p. 138). He highlights this environment to be one of the strengths of the process-based approach; it is highly democratic and is the most successful when "participants are willing to take ownership of the dramatic process and embrace its outcome" (p. 139), meaning that this process works best in a collaborative classroom with motivated students. Moody then suggests the value of this instruction is augmented when small-scale products are used. These products can be accomplished in several ways such as through an in-class performance of a short skit or scene, having one student write a scene for a group of classmates to read, or through a reflection on what was learned through a casual game or role play. Moody (2002) cites the reasons why these products are needed as the opportunity for reflection and assessment from an audience there to specifically value their efforts and the structure of the product-based approach that motivates students to perform well. The students can also reap some of the benefits of the product-based approach such as developing a shared meaning with other students and seeing a real-world application to their classwork. Even so, the emphasis of the activity will still lie in the process.

Devised Work

Occasionally larger-scale products, reminiscent of those from the product-based approach, can develop as a result of process-based activities when similar themes emerge from the activities and the class truly forms a cohesive ensemble. In theatre, this event is known as *devising*—a process

where an ensemble creates a performance around key ideas and themes. To define it further, Scally (2019) explained the process of devising:

Devised work is here very much viewed as a process, that can find its stimulus or beginning in anything—moving away from conventional notions of a pre-existing script. Additionally, pliability and openness are considered appealing to practitioners who wish to work as far removed as possible from pre-conceived notions of creativity or performance, especially with participants who are unfamiliar with working with drama. (p. 33)

This quotation establishes devising as a culmination of the process-based approach, a summation of the “open learning environment” and the compromise needed from educators more hesitant to leap into theatre as well as emphasizing the products often required from a process-based approach. Mermikides and Smart (2010, as cited in Scally, 2019) emphasize that devising is the product as well as the process, providing the benefits of both *product* and *process-based* approaches.

As outlined by Wagner (2002), one history lesson taught to elementary aged students (aged 7 to 9) exemplified the idea of a process-based product and a devised project done in a class environment. The teacher, Christopher Ford, led the children in the class through a series of “drama, reading, and writing exercises” based around their responses to the story of an 1869 boiler explosion that killed several mill workers and eight children playing during recess in a playground right by the sight of the explosion. The students conducted library research of primary and secondary sources that allowed them to place themselves into the period as the surviving students of the accident. After an exploration through dance and drama of the different perspectives and emotions the children must have felt that day, the students narrowed the focus of their project to what the “first scream” must have been like. They created images with their bodies and poems about that first scream. Their work was displayed for parents and was subsequently praised for the emotional depth and technical writing skills the work showed from students of such young ages.

Here the product was clear: a physical and a written representation of the first scream. However, the focus of the lesson was on the exploration of the topic. The product came from the process. It was never intended for their project to take the form of writing about the first scream; this result was just where their exploration led them. This lesson exemplifies devised work in that the product, the final performance of the imagery and poetry, developed from a broad idea and narrowed with the interests of and talents of the group before taking the final form. In addition to exemplifying one of these approaches, this lesson is a testament to the efficacy of theatre in the language classroom. One eight-year-old students’ poem was noted for its maturity and complexity of language that conveyed a “powerful impact of this profound response to a real but at first distant historical event” (Wagner, 2002, p. 15). Not only did the student’s control over language and use of rhetoric devices like juxtaposition and sensory imagery improve, but so did their connection to this event. Their affect was raised, thus improving motivation and emotional connection to the source material. In the language classroom, this process would work the same. Students’ academic skills improve and so does their affect as a result of the devising and the completion of the final product.

While that example may not be suitable for modern students, it still stands to show the power of devising on students’ skills. Devising can come from anything. Instead of personal journals and newspaper articles around a horrific event, teachers could have students follow the same process about personal memories or lighter, less traumatic stories from history. For instance, as a final project, the students could all share verbally or write down their favorite memories from

the class which would spur discussion that would lead to the creation of a performance of favorite classroom activities, funny in-class jokes, and sweet moments between friends to summarize the semester or year. In my own experience, this devising process was done using fairy tales. Students were asked to pick a fairy tale or legend from any region and with a small group, research the fairy tale's history, art, and the actual story before creating an informed retelling of this story to perform for the class. The topic is up to the educator, the needs of the students, and the demands of the curriculum, but the process and benefits remain the same. Thus, the two approaches established here, process and product-based, fit classes differently and provide countless opportunities to learn. The two also share a considerable deal of overlap, fitting the needs of every class.

Practicality

The dramatic arts are not every teacher's forte, so hesitation is to be expected. However, the beauty of the theatre is that it is what one makes of it. Royka (2002) identified four key fears language teachers have that bar them from using theatre in their classroom. This section will address three of those fears.

The first fear she discussed was a teacher's lack of knowledge of dramatics. We generally stick to what we know and many teachers feel they just would not know what to do (Royka, 2002). This fear can be assuaged by the aforementioned levels of commitment provided with the process-based style. One can start with a simple exercise and build up to more involved product-based lessons such as a full production if desired. Royka also highlights that there is a plethora of resources written specifically for the untrained language teacher that guide one through exercises, activities, and projects of varying difficulty. Theatre as a discipline can be as structured or unstructured as one wishes and the beauty of the artistic process is that even the simplest of activities can create the most profound outcome.

The second fear she presented was the fear of embarrassing oneself in front of students. A perilous fear indeed, but in order for a teacher to establish a community of safety where students can be vulnerable, take risks, and have fun, the teacher must also be willing to step outside of their comfort zone. The artistic process of theatre should be "all members creating the experience together" which involves risk taking on both sides (Royka, 2002, para. 7). A teacher should never ask students to do something they would not be comfortable doing themselves. If hesitant, a teacher should slowly move from warm-ups and smaller activities into ones that require more from both teacher and student.

The third fear is more of a hesitancy from the more traditional teachers who do not view drama as a serious study method or worry they would lose control of their class (Royka, 2002). This fear can certainly be the case in college preparatory programs or any program where academic language is the focus. Because teacher education can often emphasize "the one-way transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student, rather than the creation of a learning situation in which the student is also the teacher" (Wessels, 1987, p. 14), some traditional-minded teachers may face boundaries with their personal ideas of pedagogy, worry about being unable to reach standards, or feel inadequate to prepare their students if they are asked to implement drama in their classes. Additionally, some may worry that in adult ESL settings where attendance and class structure work differently, it may be hard to engage students who may not come in each week or have more immediate needs. Once again, Royka (2002) establishes that warming up to drama is key. By slowly exploring this non-traditional approach to language education, teachers can find methods that work for them and implement new classroom management styles that keep things more contained. For the more academic classes, I suggest that drama activities can be seen as

breaks from the typical routine of studying and helpful at engaging students amidst even the most boring history lesson. Additionally, the malleable nature of theatre allows it to fit into any curriculum. An adult class with varying attendance can prioritize lessons that take place completely within each class period or a part of it. The beauty of using theatre and drama-based approaches is the flexibility. Educators can start small and move to bigger things, exploring what works for them and their students.

Students may also experience similar fears. Some may lack the emotional or physical energy to exert toward performing, while others may experience stage fright. The solution to these problems goes back to what has been reiterated above: theatre and drama-based instruction is a process that must be undergone with the consent of both educators and students. When one moves from simple, low risk activities into the complex, both parties can grow into comfort and familiarity with theatre. Taking this care throughout the process will ease the fears and hesitations of both parties and ultimately, augment the positive effects of theatre.

Conclusion

Performance is at the very center of our existence as people. One of the most prominent ways we perform the roles we play in our lives is through language. When approaching teaching language and developing fluency in that language, too often is language education approached as if it is an academic subject no different than history or chemistry; however, language must be taught as it exists naturally, as a performance deeply ingrained in our identities and personal histories.

When we teach language through theatre, we create a classroom that mimics the real world, providing a safe rehearsal for real world scenarios that is as close to reality as possible. This creation of a rehearsal space eases fears about using the TL in interactions with more proficient speakers and encourages them to take risks in this safe space. The creative nature of drama also establishes a more relaxed class environment where the rest of the class (the audience) may reward risk-taking that results in playful, humorous language or mistakes with laughter. The audience reaction and the gratification of successfully communicating bolster greater self-confidence. This style of instruction will also improve control and fluency over language with a wide variety of activities tailored towards helping improve various areas of language.

To accomplish theatre/drama-based instruction, there are two main ways to approach the integration: either through process or product-based learning. Product-based is typically done on a larger scale and involves an interdisciplinary aspect. The goal of this style is the culmination of the lesson or unit as a project, or in this case, a production. Process-based is typically more malleable and the emphasis is on what is learned along the way. The two are not mutually exclusive and many process-based methods rely on smaller scale projects to show learning or guide the process. Sometimes, process-based projects can produce a product that resembles product-based projects in what is known as devising.

Finally, it is important to note the malleability of this integration and the importance of an open mind when shifting the instruction. Hesitation is natural and expected, but the openness of theatre allows for much flexibility so that one can ease in. Theatre recontextualizes language and creates an environment ripe for learning. When educators shift their mindset, they can create great personal change and significant linguistic development within their students. I hope the discussion presented here have inspired educators to integrate this art into their classroom. When language is accessible, approachable, and relevant, language is achievable.

References

- Anderson, J. (2021). A framework for project-based learning in TESOL. *Modern English Teacher*, 30(2), 45–49.
- Burke, A. F., & O’Sullivan, J. (2002). *Stage by stage: A handbook for using drama in the second language classroom*. Heinemann Drama.
- Carson, L. (2012). The role of drama in task-based learning: Agency, identity and autonomy. *Scenario: A Journal of Performative Teaching, Learning, Research*, 6(2), 47–60. <https://doi.org/10.33178/scenario.6.2.6>
- Davies, P. (1990). The use of drama in English language teaching. *TESL Canada Journal*, 8(1), 87–99. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v8i1.581>
- DiNapoli, R. (2009). Using dramatic role-play to develop emotional aptitude. *International Journal of English Studies*, 9(2), 97–110.
- Dodson, S. (2002). The educational potential of drama in ESL. In G. Bräuer (Ed.), *Body and language* (pp. 161–179). Praeger.
- Ellis, R. (2015). *Understanding second language acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Fonio, F. (2012). Stuffed pants! Staging full-scale comic plays with students of Italian as a foreign language. *Scenario: A Journal of Performative Teaching, Learning, Research*, 6(2), 18–27. <https://doi.org/10.33178/scenario.6.2.4>
- Gee, J. (2011). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. Hoboken.
- Hann, D. (2017). Building rapport and a sense of communal identity through play in a second language classroom. In N. Bell (Ed.), *Multiple Perspectives on Language Play* (pp. 219–244). Walter de Gruyter.
- Kuyumcu, F. N. (2013). Using theatre techniques in foreign language education: A study on Molière’s plays. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 6–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.032>
- Lee, B. K., Enciso, P., & Brown, M. R. (2020). The effect of drama-based pedagogies on K–12 literacy-related outcomes: A meta-analysis of 30 years of research. *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 21(30), 1–30. <http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea21n30>
- Lei, L. W., & Huang, C. F. (2012). Learning English through musicals: A case study of social economically disadvantaged aboriginal students in Eastern Taiwan. *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing: A Journal of Digital Humanities*, 6(1–2), 204–210. <https://doi.org/10.3366/ijhac.2012.0049>
- Maley, A., & Duff, A. (1978). *Drama techniques in language learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Meisner, S., Longwell, D., & Pollack, S. (1987). *Sanford Meisner on acting* (1st ed.). Vintage.
- Mermikides, A., & Smart, J. (2010). *Devising in process*. Red Globe Press.
- Moody, D. J. (2002). Undergoing a process and achieving a product: A contradiction in educational drama? In G. Bräuer (Ed.), *Body and language* (pp. 135–160). Praeger.
- Ntelioglou, B. Y. (2011). “But why do I have to take this class?” The mandatory drama-ESL class and multiliteracies pedagogy. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 16(4), 595–615. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2011.617108>
- Pandian, A., Ling, C. L. C., Lin, D. T. A., Muniandy, J., Choo, L. B., & Hiang, T. C. (Eds.). (2014). *Language teaching and learning: New dimensions and interventions*. Cambridge.

- Pang, M. (2019). Developing core practices for EFL/ESL teaching: A framework for methodology course design. *TESOL Quarterly*, 53(1), 258–273. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.487>
- Park, H. (2015). Student perceptions of the benefits of drama projects in university EFL: Three case studies in Korea. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, 14(3), 314–334. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-06-2015-0047>
- Royka, J. G. (2002). Overcoming the fear of using drama in English language teaching. *Internet TESL Journal*, 8(6). <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Royka-Drama.html>
- Scally, G. (2019). *Group devised theatre for second language acquisition* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Manchester]. ProQuest.
- Schechner, R. (2020). *Performance studies: An introduction* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Smith, S. M. (1984). *The theater arts and the teaching of second languages*. Addison-Wesley.
- Stern, S. (1980). Drama in second language learning from a psycholinguistic perspective. *Language Learning*, 30(1), 77–100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1980.tb00152.x>
- Wagner, B. J. (1979). Using drama to create an environment for language development. *Language Arts*, 56(3), 268–274.
- Wagner, B. J. (2002). Understanding drama-based instruction. In G. Bräuer (Ed.), *Body and language* (pp. 1–18). Ablex.
- Wessels, C. (1987). *Drama*. Oxford University Press.