Erika Piazzoli, Assistant Professor in Arts Education, Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin.

Process Drama and Second Language (L2) Learning Research: An Overview

Process drama for Second language learning (L2 process drama) is a relatively new field of enquiry, which has gained momentum in the last decades.

The first L2 process drama study was Kao's (1995) investigation of the impact of process drama on L2 classroom interaction. This was a mixed-methods study, conducted at a Taiwanese university, with 33 undergraduate learners of English. Kao's intervention lasted 14 weeks; for the purpose of data analysis, four activities were selected and coded for turn-taking. Kao used van Lier's (1988) classification for turn-taking: topic management, self-selection, allocation and sequencing. Overall, her findings indicate a significantly high percentage of spontaneous participation, over the four turn-taking categories, when using process drama, with the students taking 20% more turns than the teacher (1995, p.96).

In 1998, Kao and O'Neill expanded Kao's findings into *Words into Worlds*, a seminal text on L2 process drama. Building from Kramsch's (1985) continuum of classroom interaction - spanning from 'instructional' to 'natural' discourse, Kao and O'Neill consider a range of dramatic approaches, creating a continuum from 'totally controlled language exercises' to 'open communication'. They argue that *scripted role-plays*, common in L2 learning, fall on the 'controlled communication' end, and *process drama* on the 'open' end of the continuum.

Controlled communication		**Open communication**
OBJECTIVES	Accuracy Practice Confidence	Fluency Authenticity Confidence Challenge New classroom relation
ORGANIZATION	Pair work Small groups Rehearsal	Begins with large group Pair work and small groups as work continues
CONTEXT	Simple Naturalistic Teacher selected	Launched by teacher in role Developed with students' input
ROLES	Individual Teacher determined Fixed attitudes	Generalized at first Becoming individualized at students' own choice later
DECISIONS	None	Negotiated by students
TENSION	To produce accuracy of language and vocabulary	Arising from dramatic situation and the intentions of the roles
TEACHER FUNCTIONS	To set up the exercises To provide resources To be evaluator	In role As model To support To provide resources To challenge

Kao & O'Neill's Continuum of Communication (1998, p.16)

Kao and O'Neill (1998) also note the crucial role of a language reflection at the end of each drama session, to revise and acknowledge the *new language* acquired. Throughout the book, they make explicit connections between Second Language Acquisition and process drama:

> Language acquisition arises from the urge to do things with words, and this need becomes paramount in process drama, when participants are required to manipulate the dramatic circumstances to achieve their own goals. (p. 4)

THE FUNCTIONS OF DRAMA IN THE L2 CLASSROOM

Liu (2002) builds from Kao and O'Neill's framework, endorsing the benefits of L2 process drama, and identifying three functions of process drama in the L2/FL classroom: a *cognitive*, a *social* and an *affective* function. Liu highlights a number of strategies that characterise L2 process drama:

1) Determining the context and creating a pre-text;
2) Identifying a variety of roles for students and the teacher;
3) Building different levels of tension to sustain dramatic activities;
4) Utilising body and language in developing communicative competence;
5) Reflecting on the experiences, reinforcing and explaining linguistic expressions that emerge in the drama (2002, p. 57).

Since these foundations were laid, several research studies have explored the nature of L2 process drama, confirming its potential to foster motivation to communicate in the target language.

For example, Stinson's Drama and Oral Language (DOL) project reveals a positive correlation between process drama and ESL students' oral communication scores, motivation and self-confidence (Stinson, 2008; Stinson & Piazzoli, 2013). This was a multiple site case study, involving four 10-hour process dramas, aimed at improving the oracy of English learners in Singapore. A total of 140 students were involved, 70 from the drama intervention, and 70 from the comparison group. All participants undertook a pre- and post-intervention test. Stinson (2008) summarises these findings in four categories: 1) the contextualisation of language; 2) the motivation, confidence and enthusiasm that drama promotes; 3) the encouraging and safe atmosphere of the drama classroom, and 4) the shift in power from teachers to students.

Bournot-Trites, Belliveau, Spiliotopolous and Séror's (2007) mixed-methods study also explores the value of process drama in reducing the teacher-centred nature of second language learning. The researchers observed the difference between two elementary classes: one using a teacher-centred approach (library group), the other using process drama, in a Canadian French Immersion context. Data from pre-and post-testing, field observations, and teacher journals reveals that students' motivation to learn the target language was significantly higher in the drama group (p. 19). Students' interviews indicate that the drama group created their own knowledge *through* the drama, while the library group was relying on the *teacher* as a source of knowledge. Similarly, data from teachers' journals and interviews reveals major differences in the two groups; as the course progressed, in the library group, the teacher felt "compelled to entertain the students" to sustain their interest and motivation. On the contrary, the drama group teacher noted that, as the drama evolved, role-playing became a natural way to communicate and discover together (pp. 23-24). This research emphasises the meaning-making nature of process drama.

Araki-Metcalfe's (2008) study explores the responses of Japanese primary school students learning English through educational drama. The research was conducted in a Japanese primary school, with three Year 6 English classes of Japanese students, and their teachers.

The project spanned over 12 weeks of action research cycles. Data from video-recording, questionnaires, class discussion, interviews, students' work and the researcher's journal reveal that the students underwent a gradual change, towards deep engagement.

Yaman Ntelioglou's (2011) research focuses on drama as an 'embodied pedagogy', creating 'identity texts', as participants incorporated their life experiences and identities in the second language drama classroom (p. 602). Her ethnographic study involved 50 adult learners of English, in a Canadian adult school. She argues that through drama, AL learners made use of verbal modes (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and non-verbal modes (visual, embodied, audio, gestural, tactile, spatial) to create meaning, thus framing drama as a 'multiliteracy pedagogy'.

Kao, Carkin and Hsu (2011) researched the kind of questions L2 drama teachers ask, in and out of role. Analysing the teachers' questions, data suggests that dramatic role enabled the teachers to use a broader range of social registers, contexts and relationships. The data was collected within a three-week intensive course, in 2007, with 30 Taiwanese university students of English (intermediate). Kao et al. (2011) distinguish between two kinds of teacher questions: display questions, where the answer is known in advance by the teacher, and referential questions - genuine requests for information. The authors use a question taxonomy that identifies a number of elicitation functions: informing, confirming, agreeing, committing, repeat, clarifying, asking pseudo-questions and performing comprehension checks (pp. 493-494). The findings reveal that informing questions, that is, referential questions with no previous assumption from the speaker, occurred more often. The researchers interpret this outcome as process drama creating a need to communicate in real social contexts (p. 503).

To, Chan, Lam and Tsang (2011) study consisted in a year-long process drama teacher development program, in 2008–2009, with 160 teachers of English in Hong Kong. The researchers selected six schools, and conducted interviews with principals, teachers, students and parents. They summarise the benefits of L2 process drama as: motivation to learn, confidence in speaking, improvement in writing, using language in context with purpose, richer means of expression, engagement of students of different abilities, more active participation, better teacher student relationship, and more supportive and appreciative attitudes amongst students (p. 524).

Piazzoli's study (2011) with undergraduate students of Italian (advanced level) as a Second Language in an Australian university reveals a connection between affective space, the safe space created by process drama work, and the reduction of adult language anxiety, on the willingness to communicate construct. In a more recent study, Piazzoli (2014) worked with three groups of L2 language teachers and international students of Italian in Milan, Italy, for a total of 45 hours process drama. She focuses on the engagement and artistry of process drama for language learning, with engagement framed as perception-in-action, and the artistry of process drama connected to agency, intercultural awareness and dramatic irony.

Rothwell's (2011) intervention involved a state secondary school in Australia, with grade 8 (12-13 years old) learners of German (beginner level), over two terms. Rothwell's data included: video-recording of classes; two questionnaires; four sets of focus groups exploring the contribution of the kinaesthetic communication to authentic language interaction whilst also examining the role of the process drama in making the kinaesthetic more possible. She argues that by using bodies as a visible, tangible springboard for language this class became engrossed in each other's work, copying and re-creating verbal and kinaesthetic interactions to rehearse familiar utterances and develop new ones.

For more comprehensive reviews of research, see Stinson and Winston (2014) *Drama education and second language learning: A growing field of practice and research*; and Belliveau and Kim (2014) *Drama and L2 Learning: Research Synthesis*. To find out more, come to the II International Scenario Conference, Performative Spaces in Language, Literature and Culture Education, May 25-28 2017, University College Cork (Ireland) www.ucc.ie/en/scenario/scenarioforum/scenarioforum-conference2017/

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